

CAPITOL STUFF

By MICHAEL O'NEILL

Washington, July 27 — What with test bans, civil rights and other odds and ends, we are loath to add still another crisis to the nation's anxiety neurosis. But, it should be known, there is an alarming worldwide shortage of spies.

Although it's top secret, of course, the peek-a-boo organizations of most big countries are in a shambles. They've been decimated, picked nearly as clean as a turkey bone, by the mass exposure of their most talented agents.

As a result, there is such a scramble for new recruits that some spymasters are shamelessly raiding the secret cells of other spymasters. It has got so bad that there are now triple and quadruple agents. Even James Bond isn't quite sure who is spying for whom.

And every outfit is frantically offering more and more fringe benefits in a wild effort to keep their spies contented with their gay lot—bigger liquor allowances, old-age pensions, anti-execution insurance and dreamy assignments like that Christine Keeler affair.

In fact, if we may be permitted a tiny security leak, this is the real reason why CIA Director John A. McCone and his fellow spies have been padding up to Capitol Hill the last few days for secret huddles with secret subcommittee No. 1 of the House Armed Services Committee.

Their cover story was that they were on a routine mission to sell Congress on setting up a Central Intelligence Agency retirement system to give their overworked spies in Russia the same benefits as any underworked American diplomat. Their real pitch, however, was that they desperately needed more fringe benefits to keep their agents from being lured away by fat offers from such big-spending rivals as Britain's MI5 or Russia's KGB.

"I believe it is essential," McCone testified, "that the superb quality of men and women in CIA be maintained and indeed be improved, and moreover that the dedication of these employees be recognized by the provision of active benefits."

Amen. There is no time to lose. In fact, we have it from a completely reliable quadruple agent that there is already an active international black market



Now Spying Is Big Business

Quentin (Shoddy) Passamaquoddy, director of a private espionage recruiting service, shed some interesting light on the reasons for the manpower crisis during an interview in an abandoned Minuteman silo. (Passamaquoddy is an alias because spy recruiters are expected to observe the same maximum security precautions as their clients.)

"Well, sir," Shoddy began, "it's all pretty simple. Spying has got to be an awfully big business. In fact, if the truth were known, it's just about the biggest industry going. Why, the Communists alone have got more than 300,000 agents in the field. And the Western allies aren't slouches, either."

Another factor which Shoddy cited, as he tapped out a coded message to Macao, is the impact of automation. Or rather the lack of it. While lesser men have fallen before the computers, the spy has never yielded. The wiles of a Christine or an Ivanov or the artistry of a master blackmail are as indispensable as ever. "Of course, there is also the matter of these recent security breakdowns," said Shoddy with a faint smile. "As you know, there has been a regular epidemic of disclosures. There have had to be some wholesale replacements in Russia, Sweden, Germany and several other countries. Russia has been picking up CIA spies and the FBI has been picking up KGB agents."

Tough on Britain and Sweden

All of this is very untidy, because Russia has to haul its spies home and round up some replacements, and the CIA has to do the same. Poor old Britain and Sweden are having to import an entirely new supply, and West Germany is just about as badly off.

This had led to such complications as the triple and quadruple agent. The triple agent is a mixed-up chap who gives the impression of spying for country A, while only pretending to spy for country B, but who really is country B's man. A quadruple agent, take it on faith, is even more sophisticated.

Another byproduct of the mass disruption of major spy networks is that a lot of top agents, with many good years still ahead of them, are suddenly being removed from plush bigtime jobs. If they don't have a good retirement program, they are having to settle for lesser posts being offered by the recruiting services on behalf of aspiring young underdeveloped nations.

Their departure, of course, triggers a critical shortage of undiscovered spies available for the top assignments in Moscow, Washington, London, Bonn and Paris. As Shoddy explained it, this is why the major powers have been doing everything possible to improve working conditions. They want to be able to outbid private industry for talent.

Longer Life Expectancy for Spies Now

Thus, there is now a kind of gentleman's agreement that a captured foreign spy will not be executed unless it is absolutely unavoidable. Also, where possible, spies are labeled diplomats so they can simply be deported without any fuss.

Efforts are also being made to emphasize the respectability of the spy profession without downgrading the glamor (the Keeler-Ivanov affair has been a real boon). And, as McCone testified, there is a heavy new emphasis on pensions and other security guarantees.

If Congress will just see the light, the CIA hopes it can fend off raids on its spy staff. Otherwise, let's face it, the outlook is grim. A spy without a pension is a real security risk.